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ABSTRACT

A case study method was used with eight female elementary school teachers to investigate the relationships among their understandings of moral and educational issues and how they conduct their classrooms. Data were collected through individual interviews, videotapes, classroom observations, and teachers' written position papers. It was found that there were differences among teachers on: (1) their understandings of rules; (2) their perceptions of their role as teacher; (3) their expectations concerning the interactions of students in the classroom; and (4) the perspective they took while discussing educational issues. Four teachers stressed the importance of rules, valued an authoritarian role for the teacher, emphasized conformity on the part of students, and talked mainly from their own perspective as teachers. The other teachers stressed the importance of students' rights, valued a democratic role for the teacher, emphasized individual differences among students, and more often took the perspective of the students. (FG)

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RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LEVEL OF MORAL COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT,
TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF EDUCATIONAL ISSUES
AND TEACHING PRACTICES

by

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the possibility of relationships between level of moral cognitive development, teachers' understanding of issues related to teaching and teaching practice. In other words, are there relationships between how teachers understand moral issues, how they understand educational issues and how they conduct their classrooms?

This study took the position that teaching is inherently and inescapably a moral activity. Moral decisions and judgments revolve around how expectations about teacher/student actions are known, coordinated and/or shared by the student and teacher. As Witherall (1978) points out:

Within every classroom and school community there exist dilemmas involving the competing claims of individuals, whether the issue is the way rules and decisions are made, the appropriateness of a child's behavior, the appropriateness of a teacher's behavior, the fairness of an administrative policy, or the relevance of a curriculum to student's lives. In essence, the justice networks of a school and classroom become moral laboratories in which various points of view and levels of analysis can be explored. (p. 68)

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Since teachers make decisions concerning rules, define appropriate behavior, implement policies, determine curriculum and communicate expectations, they are involved in moral activity. Their understanding of how competing claims of individuals within their classrooms are to be resolved may be reflected in their moral cognitive development. Kohlberg has devised a scheme which looks at level of

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moral cognitive development. Taking this scheme as the basic unit of analysis, this study focused on the relationships between a teacher's level of moral cognitive development as measured by Rest's Defining Issues Test (DIT) and how "justice networks" are understood and established in the classroom.

SUBJECTS: Twenty-seven inservice teachers involved in a cooperative masters program at the University of Utah were given the DIT. Eight were selected on the basis of P score for case studies. Four of the teachers received P scores below 25 (9, 21, 21, 23), and four received P scores above 34 (34, 36, 37, 41). All were female¹, at least 25 years of age, from the same school district, with at least 5 years experience teaching grades 2-5.

PROCEDURE: Data was collected for a case study of each teacher in the following sequence:

- 1) individual interviews
 - a) one hour interview covering purposes and practices related to classroom management
 - b) one hour interview covering general topics related to teaching philosophy and classroom practices
- 2) an hour long videotape of each teacher's classroom followed by an indepth discussion of the teacher's discussion of her purposes and practices
- 3) classroom observations and tape recordings of classroom interaction
- 4) position papers: weekly written assignments designed to get the teachers to reflect on different teaching issues related to their own classrooms

The data was collected over an eight month period from October 1980 to May 1981.

ANALYSIS: Analysis of the data was conducted in two ways:

Each teacher's data was correlated, examined collectively across sources and statements were collated with particular emphasis placed on 1) explicit

¹Because all subjects in this study were female, the female pronoun will be used throughout.

content (what was said); 2) reasoning behind statement and 3) examples of execution (self report of teaching practices). An example of explicit content for grading was: "I believe that grades must be earned and not just given"; reasoning was: "it is important to consider effort...those students who complete the assignments and work hard should be rewarded." As an example of practice the subject states: "the highest grades are received by those children who are performing in a higher reading level than those in a middle or lower reading group. The best grades are given to those children who perform a high level of achievement in spelling and math."

A profile for each teacher was written which focused on: 1) structure of classroom; 2) rules and discipline techniques used; and 3) attitudes toward children.

The interviews, videotape session, position papers and ethnographic observation notes were then analyzed and a comparison framework formulated for examining across the teachers for content, reasoning and practices. Excerpts pertaining to the above areas were taken from the data for all the teachers in units large enough to allow for contextual continuity.

Because of the extensive nature of this study, this paper will present only the data gathered for the comparison among teachers which indicated the existence of differences. Included in the original study is a section discussing situational factors which placed constraints on these teachers and led to attitudes and practices which were similar.

DIFFERENCES

It was found that the teachers in this study held "teaching views" which consistently reflected cohesive attitudes about educational issues. In many cases, these attitudes were reflected in the teaching practices these teachers adopted.

This "teaching view" generally divided the teachers into two groups which corresponded to scores received on Rest's DIT. This paper presents the data which indicated the existence of consistent differences between teachers in these two groups: Throughout this discussion teachers with P scores below 25 will be referred to as Group A (Alice, Betty, Carol and Diane) while teachers with P scores above 34 will be referred to as Group B (Kathy, Lucy, Marcy, and Nan). The following discussion summarizes the major differences between the two groups of teachers. The differences revolved around issues of rules, the role of the teacher and classroom interactions.

Rules: Group A

Teachers in Group A tended to emphasize the importance of rules. Rules served the function of maintaining a stable social order, were established at the discretion of the teacher, and were seen as a personal extension of the teacher.

Most teachers in Group A held the belief which they stated explicitly or implicitly, that rules were necessary in order to maintain a stable social order. For example, in a journal article, one teacher maintained that all teachers in her school should enforce a school rule which asserted that students should not be in the building before classes began. She stated,

If all the teachers are consistent with keeping the kids out of the halls before the bell rings, the school will have fewer discipline problems, but if they're not, the school will become the worse behaved, with students taking over.

This statement is typical of teachers in this group. They felt strongly that specific rules needed to be established and enforced, otherwise teachers would lose control, students would "take over" and chaos would result.

The teachers in this group also stressed the importance of teachers establishing rules. Diane stated, "I have the whole thing set up, in my

manner, and my demands and the rules that I have, they know where I stand." Once the rules were established, however, the teacher retained the right to interpret, change and/or implement these rules as she saw necessary. For example, rules in Alice's room were interpreted in ways which made them contingent upon the discretion of the teacher. One rule was that the students could only use the pencil sharpener one at a time. If a child wanted to use the pencil sharpener, however, Alice stated, "If I can still see the lead, you don't need to sharpen it." Rules tended to be subordinate to the overriding categorical rule which was to obey the teacher. Alice seemed to acknowledge this when she stated that the most important rule was "that children should obey the authorities and the principal and their teachers."

For teachers in Group A, rules and authorities seemed to become one. If the students obeyed the authorities, they obeyed the rules, but if they disobeyed the rules, they disobeyed the authority who established the rules. These teachers tended to use personal pronouns in describing the rules in the classroom such as "my rules". Rules, demands and expectations were personalized, and students were seen as disobeying the teacher rather than the rules. For example, Carol talked about the importance of students obeying the rules in the sense that these rules reflected her personally - her values, standards and/or expectations. She counted on the students "for support... supporting my rules," and thus became personally affronted when a child disobeyed her rules. She stated,

I have those that they know (the rules), but they love to push me. They love to see me get to that breaking point but I see them also regretting it afterwards not because I'm mean but because they feel that they have hurt me.

Because rules were seen as necessary for maintaining a stable social order, originating from and reflecting the teacher personally, they became

extremely important for teachers in Group A.

Rules: Group B

Teachers in Group B, spoke of rules differently. They had rules which they expected students to follow, but rules as such were not the primary focus. They talked about rules functioning to assure certain rights for students and stressed the importance of a process through which students gained an understanding of reasons for rules, consequences of non-compliance and different alternatives for behavior. They did not see disobedience of rules as a personal attack.

Teachers in Group B talked about the underlying purpose of rules which was to assure certain student rights. For example, Kathy felt the ability to work in an environment conducive to learning was a student's right and the rules should reflect this right. She explained, "We're here to learn and no one has the right to take away that opportunity from anyone else."

One dilemma discussed by these teachers was the problem of assuring the right of the group to learn while protecting the right of individuals not to constantly conform to group norms. Lucy stated,

I don't think it's my job to change a child's personality. Although we have to conform in this school, I don't think it's my job to change the personality. I think it works for the short term. I can't let it interfere with the rights of the group to learn but I respect their right not to conform to my standards for their whole life or even for the whole school year.

Unlike teachers in Group A, teachers in Group B talked very little about the rules that they had in their classroom. Instead they discussed how they would like rules to be established - problems distinguishing between ideal and the real, the necessity of explaining the reasons behind the rules to the students, the need for students to understand the consequences of disobeying rules and the importance of encouraging students to accept personal

responsibility for obeying the rules. For example, when she had to make a decision, Kathy stressed that there was a need to explain the reasons for the decision to the students.

They need to have an explanation. I think there might be a difference between justifying and explaining. I'll give my rationale for something and say this is what brought me to this decision. I've made my decision and I think it's fair.

The important point is that Kathy tried to give some explanation to the students for decisions or rules that were made. She valued the importance of discussing the reasons behind the rules and offering a rationale for why she had made a particular decision.

When teachers in Group B talked about student disregard of rules, they seemed to be able to distinguish between the students disobeying them personally and disobeying the rules. Rules rather than the teacher became the object of disobedience. Unlike teachers in Group A who viewed rules as extension of the teacher, teachers in Group B referred to rules as separate entities - independent of the teacher. Consequently, they did not talk about students testing them nor stress the need to get students to relate to them in order to maintain control.

For example, instead of talking about the rule that the child had disobeyed, Marcy described the method she used when faced with a discipline problem. She related, "Generally, it's to talk with that child about what they did. Going through and trying to see what they were doing and see if they can see what effect that was having. If they can put a judgment on that effect - if it was good or bad."

In summary, teachers in Group B, did not stress rules per se in their classrooms. Although they had rules, they saw the purpose of these rules as assuring certain rights for the students such as their right to work in

an environment in which they could learn. They stressed the importance of the process used to arrive at and reasons for rules and communicated these to the student.

Role of Teacher: Group A

A teacher's conception of rules seemed to be closely related to the view the teacher had of her role in the classroom. These areas overlapped to such an extent that it was difficult to distinguish between them. A teacher's view of her role in the classroom and the teacher's view of rules and the function they served were interactive. For teachers in Group A, the function of rules seemed to be to establish her authority in the classroom and her authority was vested in the rules. Reliance upon a set of rules which were established by the teacher tended to place the teacher in an authoritarian position. Thus the view that rules were at the discretion of the teacher and the view of her role as the authority became integrated. Teachers in Group A tended to value this position and stressed the need for the teacher to be the major source of authority in the classroom.

For teachers in Group A, control became of paramount concern. They stressed the importance of the teacher being in control, of setting up the classroom situation and of getting the students to obey. Teacher control encompassed all aspects of the classroom situation - social and academic. For example, Alice stated, "I believe the teacher should be in control. I believe that if the children knew the teacher would let them get away with anything (they would take advantage) and the teacher might as well leave the classroom." For Alice, maintaining her authority became very important since she believed that cohesive social interaction or control rested solely with the teacher. There did not seem to be any in between position - the teacher was either in control or she was not.

Because these teachers saw themselves as the authority in the classroom, they talked about the need to communicate to the students what they expected. Diane stated, "I feel like I have good classroom control and that they do pretty much what I expect them to do most of the time." Similarly, Alice commented, "They (the students) have to learn what I expect." Control of the classroom was based on the necessity of getting the students to know what the teacher expected.

Because the primary emphasis was placed on communicating to the students their expectations, it seemed to become extremely important for these teachers to get the students to relate to them personally - to respond to or to please them. Alice talked about the importance of getting students to please her:

(the students) don't react the way I want them to right away... They don't please me automatically until they are sure they are comfortable with me and they know once they please me they get their rewards too. They know they'll get their praise and rewards.

Teachers in Group A, also, saw their role as one of telling the students what behavior was right and what behavior was wrong. As Betty stated, "I just lay it on the line. I feel like if you tell them how it is, they'll have sense to pick it up." Because these teachers stressed the importance of the authority of the teacher in the classroom, they felt that it was the teacher's role to tell the students which behaviors were acceptable and which were not. Rarely did they discuss helping the child work through problems and/or talk about situations where there might be more than one option open to the student. Situations tended to become black or white - the child either acted correctly as defined by the teacher or did not.

Communication in these classrooms seemed to be very one sided. The teacher set forth the standards and the class obeyed. All of these attitudes tended to place the teacher in a very autocratic position. She was in control

of the situation at all times, communicated to the students her expectations, gained compliance on the part of the student by getting the student to relate to or please her and defined for the students correct and incorrect behavior.

Role of the Teacher: Group B

In contrast to teachers in Group A who defined their role autocratically, teachers in Group B valued a more democratic interaction in the classroom. They saw their role as one of directing the students, helping them to work through situations or areas of conflict where solutions were not black or white. Consequently their role became one of encouraging cooperative interaction in the classroom.

Teachers in Group B stressed the importance of establishing a classroom where there was a balance between teacher and student rights and needs. For example, Nan talked about different methods and styles of teaching exhibited by different teachers and then stressed the need for both the teacher and student to compromise in order to create the best situation. There needed to be a balance between "imposing the total teacher comfort on kids who can't handle a particular style" - whether that style was authoritarian or democratic - and the needs of the students. Nan explained "the teacher has to come as she or he is. The teacher has to balance her needs with the kids. There's always a give and take. It just shouldn't stretch too far." One strived for a mutual accommodation on the part of the teacher and the student in order to establish the best classroom interaction. These teachers main concern was not one of establishing their authority. Instead the problem became one of setting up a system or classroom environment that took into account children's individual needs, maximizing individual potential and rights while still valuing the interaction of the group and the rights of the group.

Since teachers in Group B saw their role more democratically, they described areas in which they tried to obtain group consensus for many of the decisions that were made. Rather than getting children to learn what the teacher expected, they discussed ways in which the students participated in the decision-making process. For example, Marcy spent a great deal of time in class meetings where decisions must be reached. She believed wherever possible the group should reach a consensus:

If it's going to be something where everybody is going to have to go, we try and do consensus or try to provide options for the people who aren't going. I try to let them decide the things that they can decide...We haven't talked about consensus ever using the word consensus but we've talked about the idea that everybody needs to feel good about what we do on some things.

Because student input was valued and encouraged as part of the decision-making process, students were encouraged to speak up for their own rights. Rather than stressing the importance of getting the students to relate to them or to please them, the students needed to address issues that might be in conflict with the teacher as the authority in the classroom. For example, Marcy explained that one of her goals was to impart to the students "that sense of wanting kids to speak up for their rights - in terms of their space and needs."

Teachers in Group B saw the teacher-student relationship as a "give and take" between teachers' and students' needs and rights. Value was placed on student input into the decision making process. Consequently, students were encouraged to "speak up" for their rights and to learn to express their emotions and anger. The teacher's role was one of directing the student in dealing with problems, offering choices and discussing alternatives and consequences.

Classroom Interaction: Group A

The attitudes and practices of teachers in Group A concerning appropriate classroom interaction are closely related to how they defined their role in the classroom and their understanding of rules. Teachers in Group A seemed to value conformity on the part of the students, and used a variety of techniques which were designed to get the students to adapt both to group norms and to the expectations of the teacher. The general idea of conformity was exhibited in several ways. These teachers talked about the group as if it were one unit, stressing the importance of students outwardly appearing happy and obeying or conforming to teacher expectations. They adopted discipline and curriculum methods directed at group interaction.

Although all of the teachers in this study spoke about the group of students they had, teachers in Group A talked almost exclusively about their class as if it were one unit. When discussing the group of students, they rarely acknowledged that the group might be composed of individual students who had different needs. Groups tended to be labeled as "slow" and/or "quick", and problems that teachers had were frequently blamed on the particular characteristics of the group. For example, Betty talked about her class of third graders. She stated, "This group is on the whole, one of the slowest groups I've ever taught. The whole 3rd grade - they're just real slow."

The teachers not only talked about the group as if it were one unit, but they felt that the teacher should adopt methods directed at creating an outwardly cohesive atmosphere. For example, Alice talked about the teacher teaching "values clarification" to the students. She stated that the teacher is responsible for teaching the students "values clarification. Self respect. The self image. You have a face and you should smile. You live behind your face. I live behind my face. Let's

make the best of it. Let's be friends." There seemed to be very little effort on Sharon's part to deal with genuine problems that might exist in social relationships. The self image was the image that you portray to others, not the actual feelings that you had about yourself. The main goal was that everybody appear happy.

Conformity was stressed not only in terms of getting the students to maintain a certain standard of social interaction but also in getting the students to conform to what the teacher stated. The term that Diane used was to try to get the students so that "they just eat right out of your (the teachers) hand." She went on to tell about a student with whom she had had past experiences and was particularly pleased with his behavior. "He's always related well to me, and to have him this year and just say 'anything you say Ms...' He'll just do anything and I hope that with the training and the conditioning this year that this will carry over." One of her main goals was to get the students to conform to what she said - to train and condition them so that in the future their behavior would will be acquiescent.

Teachers in Group A tended to value and use methods of discipline and curriculum instruction which were designed to obtain a standarization among the students. For example, when discussing the issue of individualization, Alice stated:

"I think individualizing is a personal thing. It depends on the child's level. If he's on grade level he doesn't need it. Individualizing, I think is mainly for those who are below their level and who need to be brought up to the level - the grade."

Thus individualizing was designed to bring up the slower students to conform with the rest of the class.

These attitudes and methods tended to place the emphasis on groups of students who conformed to group expectations and teacher directives. This

was particularly evident when these teachers talked about the value of creating strong, harmonious group affiliations, the importance of getting students to conform to teacher expectations and the use of discipline and curriculum techniques that contributed to a conforming attitude on the part of the student.

Classroom Interaction: Group B

Teachers in Group B did not seem to stress the importance of conformity on the part of students as much as they did the right of students to maintain their individuality while still belonging to a group. They talked about problems of meeting the individual needs of students - stressing the importance of the individual not always conforming to rules or teacher directives. Whereas teachers in Group A talked about "slow" or "fast" groups, teacher in Group B talked about the variety of individuals within the group. Nan stated,

That's another frustration is there's such an incredible variety of problems. That's what I see here more than anything. It's so incredibly heterogeneous both in behavior problems and ability. The ability is everything from pre-reader to way above grade level. The spread is just incredible. The behavior is the same. Everything from kids who have serious, serious emotional problems far beyond our training and ability to deal with - to kids who are "normal" and well behaved.

For these teachers it became important to create a sense of groupness based on the needs of the students. Instead of appearing happy, relationships are stressed and valued. For example, Nan stated,

The kinds of relationship that you build when you have the kids the whole day. There are kids that I never see all morning...How do they get any sense of our belonging? There are these whole big gaps of my not knowing them. Of them picking up that I'm not that aware of them and of what they're doing.

Rather than wanting students to conform to what they say, teachers in Group B talked more about how they valued student individuality and the

importance of trying to get students to accept personal responsibility for their decisions. For example, Marcy stated,

I really want the children to learn to do things. I want it to be internalized in part of them. I want them to learn how to change the things they don't want to be part of if they see things going on around they don't like and want them to learn ways to change that - to confront authority in adults and stuff like that.

Because these teachers valued individuality, they adopted discipline and curriculum methods that were directed more at meeting individual needs. For example, Marcy's main concern about meeting individual needs in the classroom affected the way she taught the curriculum. She used a contract system, individualized the student's assignments and rarely worked with the group as a whole. Rather than valuing group responses, Marcy stated,

I don't think it's fair to a lot of them to expect them to do what everybody else does and in the same amount of time...I think there is such a variety in kids that they are at different spots at different times. Need different things. All 4th graders do not need to learn what all of the other 4th graders are learning...Something I like in my room is we do some things together where we all have to give a little. We also have the time where it's yours. If it doesn't fit you, you don't do it.

She tried to set up as many situations as possible where students had choices, did work on their own or with a partner and set their own pace for their learning.

In summary, the following conclusions were drawn from this section on differences. Each teacher held a "teaching view" which consistently reflected cohesive attitudes and practices about educational issues. There were differences between teachers with low and high P scores that revolved around: (a) the teachers' understanding of rules; (b) how they saw their role as a teacher; and (c) their expectations concerning the interaction of students in the classroom.

These differences raise several questions. For example,

1. How do these differences relate to a teachers "effectiveness" as defined by current research models?
2. How do these differences relate to the ability of a teacher to adapt classroom practices to students' developmental levels?
3. How do these differences affect a teacher's adjustment to a school system which values conformity both on the part of the teacher and the student? Might not teachers at post-conventional levels of reasoning encounter more frustrations due to pressures to conform than teachers whose main mode of thinking is at a more conventional level of reasoning?
4. If teachers hold different "teaching view," as this study seems to suggest, what implications does this have for the content presented and methods used in teacher education programs?